



The National Fatherhood and Child Welfare Network

Introduction

The National Fatherhood and Child Welfare Network (NFCWN) is a national collaborative effort that was conceptualized and commenced by Casey Family Programs (CFP) and the Massachusetts Department of Children and Family Services-Fatherhood Initiative in May 2009. The purpose of the NFCWN is to create a peer learning community of professionals and birth father partners from across the country that demonstrate leadership in child welfare systems relative to the engagement with and provision of services to birth fathers. The Network is designed to create dialogue that will examine challenges and successful engagement practices, programs, and policies that focus on effective work with birth fathers whose children are CPS involved.

An Evolving Field of Practice to Improve Safety, Permanence, and Well-Being Outcomes

The Network's primary goal is to develop strategies to improve the safety, permanence, and well-being of these children. The most recent round of CSFR assessments revealed that every state was cited for lack of effective engagement with birth fathers. At the same time, recent research points to the positive impact that engaging birth fathers, including those who are non-resident parents, has on the three cornerstones of our work: safety, permanency and wellbeing. Involvement in case planning for their children has shown to prevent placements, reduce length of stay for placed children, and increase use of kin as placement resources. Recognizing the powerful contribution made by birth fathers to permanency and to reducing the number of children in care, the purpose of the NFCWN is directly aligned with Casey's 2020 goals.

With coordination and facilitation of the Network being provided by Casey's Constituency and Community Engagement and Strategic Consulting staff, the NFCWN is rapidly growing. There are over 90 members representing 17 states and Washington D.C. Strategic direction is provided to the Network by the NFCWN Planning Team that has three areas of focus: Administration (of the Network), Professional Training & Practice, and Advocacy. The NFCWN Planning Team is comprised of child welfare practitioners and birth fathers from various organizations such as Casey Family Programs, Massachusetts Department of Children and Family Services-Fatherhood Initiative, American Humane Association, South Carolina Department of Social Services, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Administration for Children and Families, community based organizations, and fatherhood consultants groups. The NFCWN Planning Team set out to accomplish the following goals:

- To learn "who is doing what" in this evolving field of practice, sharing both innovations and challenges
- To create and maintain a Network of peers involved in improving child welfare outcomes through involving fathers
- To provide on-going support and learning opportunities to this peer Network

Peer-to-peer learning opportunities have been created for the NFCWN by conducting quarterly conference calls and maintaining a list serve site to share valuable resources and keep members connected. The NFCWN Planning Team has coordinated two national teleconference calls to date (July 16, 2009 and November 4, 2009). The format for each teleconference call consisted of presentations from several constituent groups, including child welfare professionals and birth father leaders from grassroots organizations, state child welfare agencies and national organizations. Presenters focused on three areas that were identified through a national environmental scan conducted by Casey's Systems Improvement Knowledge Management Unit. Available for public distribution, the resulting report, *Engaging Fathers in the Child Welfare System*, outlines promising fatherhood programs, practices, and policies specific to three broad approaches: 1) Father Support and Education; 2) Policy Reform and Collaboration with Cross System and Community Partners; and 3) Professional Practice and Training. In addition, birth fathers share powerful stories of recovery and reunification with their children while underscoring their experiences navigating the *Child Welfare System*.

List Serve and Resources

For more information about the NFCWN, please visit the national list serve site at <http://groups.google.com/group/national-fatherhood-and-child-welfare-Network>. The NFCWN site contains resources and information about the Network and national teleconference calls, related fatherhood reports, research summaries, and training materials that have been developed by child welfare practitioners. **For more information please contact:** Susan Getman, Senior Director, Strategic Consulting, Casey Family Programs at sgetman@casey.org or Russell Woods, Systems Improvement Specialist, Casey Family Programs at rwoods@casey.org.